

# ***Iowa Outdoors***

## **Iowa Department of Natural Resources**

### **www.iowadnr.com**

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### **PHEASANT OPENER FOLLOW-UP**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Lots of birds. A few birds. No birds.

Your success over the opening weekend of pheasant season hinged on where you hunted. Good cover; especially grassy set-aside type acres, and nearby corn stubble increased your odds. Standing corn, or lack of grassy cover, meant you worked a lot harder. “I checked maybe 85 to 90 hunters (Saturday) across Johnson County. It was real spotty,” offered Kyle Jensen, conservation officer for the Department of Natural Resources. “Some groups would have one bird; then there would be a couple hunters with three.”

The south side of the Hawkeye Wildlife Area, near North Liberty, looked like a parking lot, as shooting time (8 a.m.) arrived on Saturday. I was riding with Jensen for the day. We counted 30 vehicles stretched along several miles of gravel. Three or four campers had settled in, also. All but four or five vehicles had Johnson or Linn County plates.

By late morning, area hunters here were struggling to match the harvest expectations brought on by the summer’s 10-year high pheasant count. To be fair, though, there was standing corn just a few wing-beats away in any area where we talked to hunters. “Shoulda been here at 7:30,” laughed one hunter as we checked his group, south of Tiffin. “About 35 or 40 pheasants ran out of the grass there and into the (standing corn) field. Most were roosters.”

Still, that group of eight had popped three birds by 10 a.m. Jason Dykstra and two friends each held up a rooster, as they leaned on a tailgate. “We were coming to the end of the field. They were usually running at the end of the field,” Dykstra explained. “This one got up and all three of us shot at the same time.” That bedraggled bird was no longer a taxidermist’s dream. The other two almost sparkled, though; russet, bright red, black and white in the sun, while the three teenagers beamed.

Actually, hunting activity was tailing off as the clock ticked toward the Hawkeyes 11:10 kickoff. Several hunters said they’d be back later that day, or on Sunday.

It seems obvious, but bears repeating. Just about every hunter with a pheasant had a dog—or dogs—on hand. “She’s only 1½ years old, but she did well for her first time out,” said Mike Majerle, praising the big yellow Lab, now back in the truck. “We saw a lot of birds this morning (near the Oxford wells on the Hawkeye area). They weren’t always close enough to shoot; but we’ve seen birds down here. They’re in the weeds, the CRP, heading toward corn. We had a real good day hunting.”

But the glowing reports this year point to northwest Iowa. Summer roadside counts were up 73 percent, in a region that had the highest 2002 counts anyway. Even there, opening weekend success was so-so, fair or great...depending on your spot. “The number of hunters was about the same (as ’02),” relays DNR officer Gary Koppie from Palo Alto County. “I did see quite a few limits.” Koppie has a variety of wildlife management areas in his county. “Hunters were doing real well in the grassy areas; near food plots. It was very dry, though. Birds were scattered.”

Next door, in Emmet County, Officer Rich Jordet was almost ready to direct traffic. “I talked with hunters from 14 different states; California, New Hampshire, New York, Texas. Everybody had birds. I saw a lot of limits.” That opening weekend success might be short-lived. “All the corn is down here. That really concentrated the birds for these opening days.”

In Woodbury County, Officer Steve Jauron says hunters didn’t have a lot to show for their efforts; at least for the opener. “There were low numbers here. I don’t understand it. (It seems) some have moved off to the northeast. A dozen hunters Saturday and Sunday, with good areas to hunt, had a less than a bird apiece. There is a lot of standing corn left here,” he acknowledged. “It was pretty windy, too, on Saturday.”

But hunting is not just about putting birds in your game vest. Back in Johnson County, Jensen and I ran into a group of Ohions who make the trek each fall. John Bowling, of Dayton, was back for his 34<sup>th</sup> year. For him, it’s vacation. “Oh yeah. We spend quite a bit of money. It’s not a cheap trip,” agreed Bowling. “Over time, we got to be friends with Harvey Yoder. We come back every year, just to see him and to hunt. If we do any good, that’s just fine. If not, that’s okay, too.”

As the rest of that corn comes out, there will be many more days like that, before the January 10 close.

**A warning here. A ticket there.**

For the most part, the weekend activity was trouble free, as Kyle Jensen patrolled Johnson County in his first season opener here as a DNR conservation officer. “I had one citation for an uncased gun in a vehicle on the roadway. Other than that, I checked a lot of hunters. Everybody’s been real polite and law abiding.”

The most trouble he encountered was with illegal ATV operation. Two riders, southwest of the Hawkeye Wildlife Area walked away with tickets, after trying to outrun him on gravel roads. Three others, including a woman followed by an 8 or 9-year-old girl on a separate four-wheeler, received verbal warnings. “You can’t operate one on a public road. It has to be for farm purposes (it wasn’t) or you have to ride on private land or in the ditches,” explained Jensen.

Of more concern, were two instances of kids hunting with little or no supervision. One was a 12-year old, with his seven-year old brother stumbling behind him. Though the older boy had taken hunter education, he still needed either a license or a licensed adult with him. Jensen’s concern, though, was the trailing sibling. “With no hunter orange, as an officer, it makes me want to let them know how much safer it would be *with* hunter orange and knowing where each other was, during the hunt.”

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## **SIX HUNTERS INJURED DURING FIRST FEW DAYS OF PHEASANT SEASON**

DES MOINES – Six pheasant hunters were injured during the first three days of Iowa’s pheasant season, surpassing the total number of pheasant hunter injuries for 2002 by one.

“It’s a numbers game – more birds mean more hunters,” said Rod Slings, recreational safety program supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “With all the additional hunters, the likelihood of injuries also increases.”

In Wright County, a hunter unintentionally shot himself in the ankle Saturday. He was transported from the Community Memorial Hospital in Clarion to the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City.

In Poweshiek County, a hunter received pellet wounds to the face, neck and finger Saturday, when one or more of his hunting companions were attempting to shoot a

pheasant. He was transported from Grinnell Regional Medical Center to Iowa Methodist Medical Center in Des Moines, where he was treated and released.

In Kossuth County, a hunter was trying to clean his gun barrel that had fallen into the mud when the gun discharged, injuring his index finger. The injury occurred on Saturday. He was treated and released from Mercy Medical Center - North Iowa in Mason City.

In Marshall County, a hunter was struck in the face, arm, shoulder and sternum Sunday, by a companion hunter who was attempting to take a pheasant. He was treated and released from the Marshalltown Medical and Surgical Center.

In Palo Alto County, a Minnesota pheasant hunter was swinging on a pheasant and struck a relative on Sunday. The victim was transplanted to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

A Michigan hunter was struck by numerous pellets Monday, when a hunting companion swung and shot at a pheasant in Poweshiek County. The hunter was treated and released from Grinnell Regional Medical Center.

“I can’t stress enough the importance of knowing where all the members are in the hunting group, staying within the safe zone of fire and wearing blaze orange,” Slings said.

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## **HUNTERS FIND THREE METH LABS DURING OPENING WEEKEND**

DES MOINES – The Division of Narcotics Enforcement from the Iowa Department of Public Safety investigated three meth lab dumpsites reported to them by pheasant hunters during opening weekend. Two dumpsites were in Monroe County and one in Boone County. No hunters were injured from the encounters.

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## **FALL TURKEY LICENSES STILL AVAILABLE IN FOUR ZONES**

DES MOINES – The fall turkey hunting season has been open for two weeks, and judging by the number of licenses available, hunters may be focussing more on pheasants this year.

“We have an excellent turkey population over most of the state and the fall is a great time to be in the woods,” said Terry Little, wildlife research supervisor for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. “Hunting turkeys in the fall is a little different technique than in the spring. Rather than sitting and using decoys to call birds in, hunters will bust up the flock, then sit and call the birds back to them.” Hunters can take male or female birds in the fall.

Iowa residents may purchase up to two fall turkey licenses at any of more than 900 sales agents across the state. Licenses cost \$23 and hunters must select a zone to hunt.

<b>Licenses available</b>	<b>Zone</b>
10	1 – All units of Stephens State Forest west of Hwy. 65 in Lucas and Clarke counties
15	2 – All units of Shimek State Forest in Lee and Van Buren counties.
Sold Out	3 – All units of Yellow River State Forest in Allamakee County
527	4 – Southern Iowa
Sold Out	5
1,127	6 – Northeast Iowa
Sold Out	7
Sold Out	8

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## **FEMALE DES MOINES FALCON DIES**

DES MOINES - The adult female peregrine falcon that has nested in Des Moines since 1992 has died. Employees of Smith Barney Investment firm reported the injured bird on a ledge on 38th story of 801 Grand on Wednesday. Injuries were indicative of those sustained from colliding into the railings of the ledge area.

Peregrine falcons are a dynamic species that encounter fierce battles between defenders of a nesting territory and intruders. Occasionally these battles result in the death of one of the combatants. The adult female, known as R13 from the number on the black band of left leg, had produced 24 young since her first successful nest in 1993. In 2003 the pair that has nested in alcoves of American Republic Insurance building at 601 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., raised four young, the most she had fledged in any one year. It is believed a new female is occupying the territory and falcon enthusiasts are encouraged to report any falcon whose numbered/colored band can be identified. Peregrine falcons mate for the life of either bird, but will maintain the territory if one dies by replacing a lost mate.

Peregrines were extirpated from eastern U.S. in 1960s due to environmental contaminants including DDT. Peregrine falcons were the standard-bearers of

Endangered Species Act of 1972, and their return as a biological indicator species to the health of our environment has been encouraging. Peregrine falcons were upgraded to threatened status nationally in 1997 as a result of their recovery. In 2002, there were 144 peregrine falcon territories throughout the Midwest region and 284 young produced.

As a part of the recovery, peregrine R13, was hatched or released in Kansas City in 1991 by Missouri Department of Conservation. Beginning in 1989, the Iowa DNR wildlife diversity staff assisted in the release of 168 falcons in the state. The male peregrine in Des Moines was released in 1990 in Cedar Rapids. Nineteen falcons were released in Des Moines in 1991.

In 2003, there are seven falcon territories in the state including Des Moines. Birds are nesting in Cedar Rapids, Louisa Generating Station of Mid-American Energy near Muscatine, two territories in Quad Cities, Alliant Energy plant at Chillicothe, and a wild nesting pair on a bluff near Lansing.

Many conservation organizations and environment-minded individuals have contributed to the return of peregrine falcons to Iowa. It is hoped that the Des Moines' falcon territory will go on with a replacement mate and their calls and tremendous aerial displays will impact the skies over Des Moines for many years to come.

**For more information, contact Lowell Washburn, leader of Iowa's Peregrine Recovery Team at 614-425-1023, or the DNR Wildlife Diversity Staff at 515-432-2823.**

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## **RESTORING HIGGINSEYE MUSSELS**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Leaning intently over the clam, Tony Brady flushed loose dozens of larvae with a squeeze of a plastic siphon. The off-white 'glochidia' were yielded by an endangered Higinseye mussel. And they didn't come easily.

Brady had to dive a protected bed, at the Cordova, Ill., hatchery on the Mississippi River, just to find the adult clams. Now, just a few yards from the Iowa River in Iowa City, he was squirting river water into the gill of the clam, to get it to give up its offspring. The glochidia were placed into large plastic tubs, filled with water, aeration hoses and seven-inch hatchery-raised walleyes. The agitation from the hoses kept the tiny larvae suspended until the walleyes sucked them into their gills. There, the pinhead-sized baby clams attached themselves to their new home.

“In the wild, you might find two or three glochidia on a fish. This way, we get higher infestation. That should increase the numbers that survive,” offers Brady, a mussel biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Flipping one of the inoculated fish upside down, I could make out more than a dozen tiny specks on each gill. The larvae would remain on this host for a few weeks, falling off as they became able to fend for themselves. The federal agency is working with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and agencies in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Missouri to restore populations of the endangered Higginseye species on the Mississippi and interior rivers.

In just a century, Higginseyes—and most interior mussels—have almost disappeared from once-abundant riverbeds that supported a booming clam industry up until World War II. Commercial clamming is now limited only to the Mississippi River, with restrictions on the number of species and the sizes that can be taken. Even sport harvesting by individual anglers is severely limited.

Water quality is the main culprit. Decades of silt cover former mussel beds. Chemicals may play a role as well, as well as the infestation of zebra mussels in the last decade. Also blocking the clam comeback are dams up and down the rivers. Fish, and thus the glochidia, are restricted from traveling pool to pool; not just by the massive Mississippi River lock and dam system, but the network of low-head dams on interior streams. They are concerns biologists hope can be addressed in the years ahead.

From their picnic shelter laboratory in City Park, Brady tests the glochidia for viability with a syringe, petri dish, saline solution and microscope. He takes tiny tissue samples from the 16 numbered clams for DNA matching. As offspring show up, hopefully in a few years, he can link them with their parents, to see which ones exhibit any tiny edge in the struggle against extinction.

It’s a fight that the Higginseye, and more than half of all river mussel species, are not winning. “We are losing a lot of the components of the river, those species that live in the water,” cautions DNR fisheries biologist Scott Gritters. “It is really important to keep them intact. When you start losing one, you start losing others. It is a domino effect.” Gritters, and other DNR workers helped inoculate the 3,000 young of the year walleye and then stocked them at different points on the river. A couple dozen local fish were netted on the river, too, for inoculation—adding another variable to the tenuous restoration effort.

“Historically, we know the Higginseye inhabited this stretch of the river,” explains Gritters. “We hope they drop from the fish in favorable habitat; a gravel bar, a rocky area. These fish we are stocking; walleyes, smallmouth bass we shocked, generally inhabit graveled, rocky stretches of the river.”

The Iowa River around Iowa City has had five ‘drops’ of glochidia in the last few years. Similar projects have been attempted in other interior rivers; here and in the other Upper Mississippi River states. Methods—even times of year--vary, as states experiment with ways to improve survival Higginseye ‘plants’. Brady says underwater cages in

southwest Minnesota show good early results. After a year on the bottom of the Iowa River, biologists hope to find a viable population of half-inch clams. Within a couple more years, healthy ones should be about the size of golf balls. Adults are the size of the palm of a man's hand, maybe a little thicker.

In the meantime, the window continues to close on the little understood, but highly valued organisms. "Higginseyes, all the mussels out there, are very important ecologically," emphasizes Gritters. "A lot of people think these are very simple life forms and have no value. These mussels have a symbiotic relationship with other species in the river. They need each other. They are *extremely* valuable."

And extremely scarce.

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